

## **CHARLES TAYLOR MASTER MECHANIC'S AWARD**

**Fairbanks Flight Standards District  
Office Honoree 2005**

### **RICHARD CROSS**



**CROSS, RICHARD (Sarge).** Sarge was born November 22, 1935, in Waverly, West Virginia. Here he is in a Buck Jones cowboy outfit behind the house where he was born, with Dorothy, one of his five sisters and five brothers.

Sarge started hanging out at the local Wood County Airport at a young age, riding to and from the field in the cement trucks doing war-related construction work. He remembers watching Stinson Reliants making aerial mail drops and pickups. His aviation career started as a kid washing airplanes and helping around the hangar at Rambar Aviation.

In April of 1956, Sarge joined the Air Force. Although trained on the B-46, he never worked on them, but spent his four years on the F-89, F-102, and F-106. Sarge says you could never go on the flight line with a camera back then, so he had to wait a few decades until Dan Treacle suggested this shot with an F-102 at the new Wasilla airport transportation museum.

In 1961, Sarge joined the Army and switched from fighters to helicopters. From '63 to '65, Sarge was stationed at Ft. Benning, Georgia, where he met and married Sally Lou Arnette in 1964. They had grown up within 60 miles of each other but hadn't met until then. They enjoyed 40 wonderful years together, raising her son and daughter,

his two boys, and their own daughter Lisa, who is here tonight with her son Stefan, one of Sarge's 4 grandchildren. Sadly, Sally passed away in 2004.

While at Ft. Benning, Sarge crewed the H-34 and worked on H-13s and Mohawks. Sarge's outfit, part of the 2nd Infantry Division, participated in joint training exercises as an aggressor unit. Three months after Sarge left for Alaska, parts of his division and the 11th Air Assault Division were combined to form the notorious 1st Air Cavalry that deployed to Viet Nam.

Sarge spent 1965 to 1968 at Ft. Greely where he says they worked around the clock during the winter testing season. The US Army's Arctic Test Center had the Otter, Beaver, Birdog, H-21, and the first Huey B and C models in Alaska. In 1966, with plans to bring the OH-6 to Alaska for testing, the Army sent Sarge to the Hughes factory school in Culver City, California, and the Allison engine school in Indianapolis, but the helicopter never showed up

This was the first Chinook in Alaska, an A-Model that Sarge helped pick up in Pennsylvania. It took 26 flight hours to get back, with a stop at Ft. Richardson for the first set of AirGlas Skis. This photo was taken for the rescue mission in March 1967, when Ray Genet's party attempted the first winter ascent of Mt. McKinley. Testing revealed that the frost covers would freeze down and damage the windshields until an improved model was developed with a soft liner. They also determined what had to be preheated, and for how long, if you wanted to leave the Chinook parked outside at forty below zero. It took a lot more preheating than the Boeing engineers had expected!

Unlike the busy winter season, Sarge says the summers were great, with time

for softball, fishing, and of course, hunting.

Sarge served three tours in Viet Nam: the year 1962, October of '68 to November of '69, and the year 1970. He worked on or crewed the H-21, Otter, and Hueys, but worked mostly with Cobras. Here he is in late 1970 on his last tour with D Co 158th Aviation Assault Helicopter Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division. He got a lot of experience rigging slings under Chinooks to bring aircraft back from the field. Stateside, he also spent time instructing new Cobra mechanics.

In 1973, Sarge came to Ft. Wainwright and served as a maintenance platoon sergeant. He also earned his FAA Mechanic certificate that year, and began working at Alaska Central Air. Sarge retired from the Army in 1977, but the Haggland brothers made sure his nickname stuck with him. That's Paul and John, with Dick Tomany in the middle. About 20 years ago they put Sarge's rigging expertise to use on Dick's Aeronca Sedan. Paul was giving Dick's daughter Jennifer primary flight instruction in Dad's free floatplane when the engine quit. Sarge built up a sling in the hangar before they went out to Murphy Dome, and the well-rigged load flew great, all the way back to Dick's yard. Sarge also built the rigging with John for a Cherokee Six that went down near Tanana, with the same results.

When Harold's Air bought Alaska Central in 1982, Sarge went to Air Logistics, then to Larry's Flying Service from '83 to '84, then to Harold's, after John Haggland called and asked him to be Chief Inspector. He stayed for 5 years, through the name change to Friendship Air.

Sarge made his first trip to Greenland in 1986. Here's Friendship's Chief Pilot,

the late Bob Mason, with Sarge and Copilot Rick Gray, at Station Nord in Greenland with the Twin-turbine DC-3. They had two internal 250-gallon tanks welded up by Jerry Sorem at Boeing Field that worked flawlessly. Sarge enjoyed the Nord Hilton, but said the Danish soldier's form of flight-line recreation was too fast and dangerous for him. The plane enjoyed the spacious B-52 hangar at Thule, and performed very well. At one point, they flew 27 straight days of round-trips to Nord, and put 350 uneventful hours on the plane between March and May.

In 1989 and '90, Sarge again worked for Larry's Flying Service, then went back to Greenland with a Tri-Turbo-3, an experimental Jack Conroy conversion using PT6A-45 engines, shown here before leaving Fairbanks. It had additional wet wing tanks to eliminate the cabin fuel tanks. Sarge and John Haggland shared crew duties on alternate days during what was John's 3rd season in Greenland with Polair. They were at Ice Station Ruby during the Big Blow on March 26, 1990. This was before .....and after. They turned the plane to keep it from flying, but the wind did a lot of damage - the rudder was nearly ripped off, and the elevator banged up and down so hard that the cockpit control wheel broke apart - that's Sarge holding a piece of it. And there was snow packed inside everything - in camp and in the plane. Sarge is pointing to lower wing skin damage from the aileron gust lock. It stopped just short of the fuel tank. Copilot Kirk Sweetsir uses Sarge's soldering iron to install switches in the new wheel Kirk made, which looked and worked great. After the military flew in a new rudder, and they straightened out the bird's nest of control cables, they were back in business. Captain Lloyd Zimmerman, on the left, realized one day that Sarge was the only

one who hadn't been to the North Pole. So off they went for this shot of 90 degrees North on Easter Sunday, 1990. Sarge also photographed Kee Bird, which was operating out of Ladd Field in 1947 when it went down between Nord and Thule, and was lost to a fire in 1995, just as it was about to fly again. In this harsh environment, Sarge kept his sense of humor, which included taking liberties with Ben Stevens' cartoons in an old issue of Air Force Magazine. Sarge always kept at least one eye on the job. John Haggland gives Sarge high praise as both mechanic and supervisor, saying he was very meticulous about his work, and John never had to worry about a thing with Sarge in charge while he was away. Things were always in good order when he came back.

Sarge has made a hobby out of aviation as well as a career. He's been to Oshkosh in Pete Haggland's C-1, here with Matt Anderson and Dan Treagle in '98, and has been going to the Reno Air Races since '83. This is Delmar Benjamin in the GeeBee, Everett Long watching Lefty Gardner approach in White Lightning, and Sarge and Everett in front of Dreadnaught. Here is Carole Scott, and Yogi, the lead pilot for the Canadian Snowbirds, with Sarge at Reno in '83 or '84. No one looks shy in this photo, but Carole assures me that she had to teach Sarge how to socialize back then, especially how to hug women. Remembering that Sarge is about 5 foot 5, Carole says she arranged for a very tall, voluptuous German woman named Ursula to give Sarge hug training using the immersion method. According to

recent observations of Sarge's social skills by his daughter, Lisa, the training was a complete success. In any case, Carole and Cliff Dean got Sarge involved as a Reno Pylon Judge in 1984, and he's judged every year but one since then.

From '94 to '96, Sarge built an airplane at home. This is a full-size Hamilton H-47, which is externally identical to the H-45 in which pilot Carl Ben Eielson and mechanic Earl Borland lost their lives off the coast of Siberia in 1929. Sarge built his H-45 replica from scratch, except for the engine kit and wheels. He says you need a magnifying glass to thread the nuts on the zero-zero dash-90 bolts that he used to assemble the plane. Looks very realistic, doesn't it? It's on display with parts of the Eielson/Borland wreck at the Pioneer Air Museum here in Fairbanks, another great example of a Master Mechanic's attention to detail. In fact, Sarge corrected me on Carole's story - he said Ursula was Austrian!

Sarge worked at Warbelow's from '90 to '92, and from '93 to '98. He worked for Frontier Flying Service in '93, then went back there again in '98. After having served as Chief Inspector or Director of Maintenance for nearly every one of his civilian employers, he's content these days to work as an engine specialist for Frontier, and to be, in his words, "just a mechanic." I think we can all agree that Sarge is much more than that. Thank you Sarge, for your years of dedication to aviation.